

THE WHISPER OF PEACE---WHY PRESENT HOPES SEEM VAIN

THE MACEDONIAN BATTLEFIELD.

A Survey of the Problems
Which Remain Barriers
to a Settlement.By FRANK H. SIMONDS,
Author of "The Great War."

It is the settled conviction of almost every observer of the war, both in neutral and belligerent countries, that some time within the next few weeks a definite and serious effort will be made to bring the Great War to a close. For many the arrival of the Kaiser at Constantinople, the successful termination of the great German drive to the Bosphorus, has been regarded as an appropriate occasion for a proposal made by a victorious Emperor at the close of his most spectacular and, in a military sense, his most successful campaign.

What terms will triumphant Germany offer to her foes, defeated so far, but still unconquered, and still both financially and from the military point of view able to continue the war? Will German diplomats, like the Japanese in the Portsmouth Conference, be prepared to claim all, but arrive instructed, as the Japanese representatives were, to make peace on any possible terms? In other words, how badly does Germany now desire peace? This is the determining question, and this question cannot be answered in advance.

It is possible, however, to review the major problems that must be considered by those who are to decide for peace or for war and estimate the concessions that will be insisted upon by the various combatants, measure the handicaps and barriers that, after sixteen months, still lie in the way of a settlement. Personally I do not believe peace can be made this winter or next summer, but I share the current view that an attempt to make peace will shortly be made, and I purpose in this article to discuss some of the main problems that will come with formal or informal peace negotiations.

Belgium.

First of all, there is no mistaking the fact that neither France nor Great Britain will to-day make peace or discuss peace until they are assured that the evacuation of Belgium by the Germans is to be the first article of the treaty. The debt of honor which France and England owe Belgium is alone sufficient to compel these nations to continue to fight for the deliverance of the country of King Albert from the invader until they are utterly exhausted.

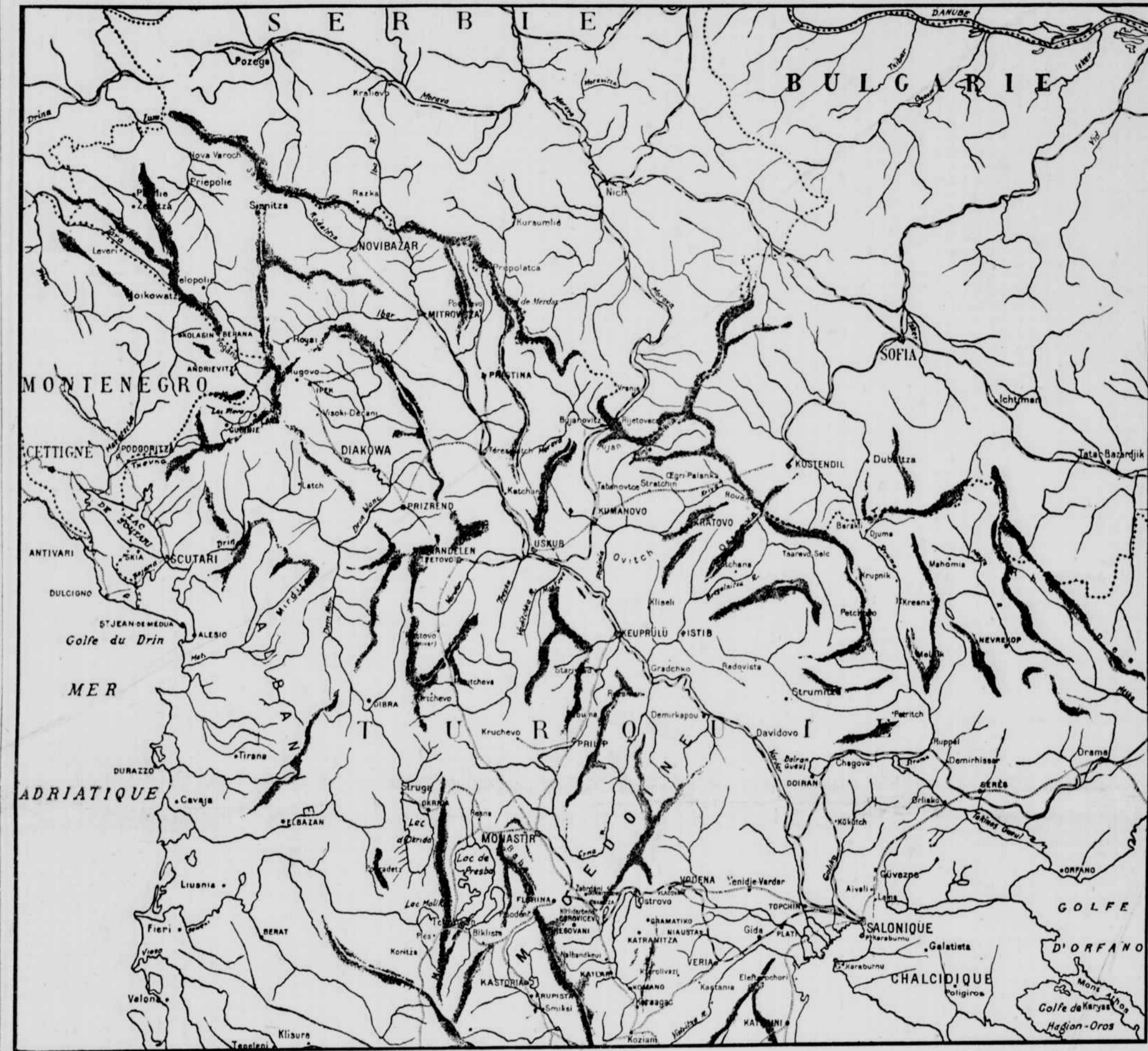
But the debt of honor is not the sole concern. Great Britain fought Napoleon for ten bitter years because the possession of Antwerp and the Belgian coast by the French Emperor was a standing menace to British existence, "a pistol aimed at the heart of England." In a century the steamboat and the Zeppelin, to say nothing of the submarine, have made the Channel a far less considerable barrier than it was in Napoleon's time. England must preserve a neutral Belgium, if she is to live herself.

As for France, the violation of Belgium by Germany is final proof that the shortest road and the best road from Berlin to Paris runs through Brussels. With Germany seated along the French frontier from the Channel to the Ardennes, France would be completely at the mercy of Germany for all time and France would sink to a second-rate power and become, in fact, a mere Teutonic vassal. For France and for England, then, the freedom of Belgium is a question of life or death, and peace is impossible until Belgium is free or they are conquered.

Indemnities.

In the same category must be placed the question of Northern France. Unless Germany is willing to retire from every inch of French territory occupied there can be no peace now, because France is not yet conquered, not even beaten in any decisive fashion, and it is only necessary to recall the French fight in 1871 to be assured that only after complete conquest will France surrender her own territory.

Assuming, then, that Germany will agree to evacuate France and Belgium, will she be able to exact a huge indemnity as the price of such a withdrawal? This is what the Germans have expected all along, and the German Minister of Finance has publicly foreshadowed such a condition as a part of Germany's terms. Yet it is well to consider what this would mean. All the European states have been forced to make terrific expenditures in the struggle, and Germany, in proportion to her resources, has spent



more than any other combatant. Were she now able to make her enemies pay her expenses she would be saved from all the greater pangs that follow war, she would easily and promptly outstrip all her enemies commercially, and they would, in fact, be reduced to the estate of slaves laboring to pay the German indemnity.

France Will Not Pay.

Nothing is more certain than that neither Great Britain nor France, as the situation now stands, will consent to pay Germany a pound or a franc. It would amount to a tribute, it would be a contribution to Germany's future prosperity and it would be a handicap to their commercial future. If Germany insists on tribute, both France and Great Britain are certain to elect to continue the war, rather than to pay Germany money, and all the nations will proceed to march with even step toward the financial exhaustion which must come with an indefinite protraction of the war.

I am satisfied that the evacuation of Belgium and France, as well as Luxembourg, are conditions essential to peace. But the British on their side, with French assent, have insisted that Belgium must be reimbursed by Germany for her great losses. Here, again, is a condition which only a conqueror can impose, and France and England are not conquerors. As for Belgium, would she prefer a year or two more of starvation and paralysis on the off chance of a German indemnity at the end? Is there any doubt? Probably, if indemnity were the only thing and Belgium were permitted to decide, she would take peace and German evacuation and let the indemnity go.

Few writers save German believe that indemnities will play any considerable part in any treaty of peace, and few believe that the states of Europe will be in condition to pay indemnities when the war is over. But certainly peace now will have to be without indemnities on either side.

Next to the liberation of Belgium, every Frenchman looks forward to the liberation of the "Lost Provinces," a tiny fraction of which are now reunited to France. Will France now insist that there can be no peace before these provinces are recovered? If she does, Germany is bound to break off negotiations, because Germany is still the victor, and victors do not give up their own territory for peace.

Alsace-Lorraine.

It is just conceivable that German statesmanship might consider the retrocession of Metz and the little strip of Lorraine inhabited by French-speaking people if France, on her side, were equally ready to renounce forever the gospel of *revanche* and accept the decision of the Treaty of Frankfurt otherwise, taking French territory in Africa as a *quid pro quo*. But this is wholly unlikely in the present temper and condition of Germany.

As for the French, there is no mistaking the fact that a majority of Frenchmen believe that Germany is already beaten and that the war, however long, can now have but one end. It is conceivable that they might consent to make peace on the terms that Germany might offer—evacuation of Belgium and France with no indemnity. It is just a shade more likely that if Metz and Thionville were thrown in France would lay down her arms. I do not believe it, but most Germans do. At all events, there is certainly no German necessity or readiness at the present moment to return the provinces won in 1870.

The Trentino and Trieste.

On what terms would Italy make peace? Manifestly she has not yet won Trieste or the Trentino. Her minor successes so far leave her still far from the realization of the dream that carried the arms of Savoy up the Adige Valley to Botzen, annexed Gorizia, Trieste and the Istrian Peninsula, and then swept south, gathering in Dal-

matia, the Adriatic islands and the chaotic Albania.

Before the war Austria offered Italy the Trentino, without Botzen, and the Gorizia district along the Isonzo, together with a few islands in the Adriatic and Albania. Italy preferred to take her chance of winning Trieste by battle. She has failed, and since there is no present prospect of success, would she now take what was offered at the outset?

The situation in the Balkans would exercise a decisive influence upon Italian action, for if Austria means to annex Serbia and Montenegro, if Bulgaria and Greece are thus to become Austro-German vassals and Turkey a Teutonic colony, then the Italian dream of reviving the empire of Venice vanishes and Italy's safety is imperilled.

Italian Desertion Unlikely.

It is hardly likely that Italy would desert her new allies to make peace on any terms that did not include Trieste, Istria and Dalmatia, but Italy would not be able to force her allies to continue the war if they were prepared to make peace and could obtain for her the Trentino province, which is absolutely essential to her safety, and perhaps in addition the Albanian protectorate, which would give her something approximating the supremacy of the Adriatic.

But if Germany persuaded Austria to cede the Trentino region, this is the extent of the concessions the Germans would now be willing to see made, for Trieste is the port not alone of Austria but of the greater Germany of Berlin dreams. It will be remembered that in all talk of peace so far Berlin has never even taken the trouble to suggest any concession to Italy. Aside from the Trentino, there is nothing in the present situation to indicate that Italy can hope for any reward for her efforts if peace comes this winter.

As to Russian concessions, all German discussions of peace have insisted upon the freedom of Poland, of all of Russian Poland, with the suggestion that Austrian Poland and perhaps a tiny bit—this last

highly problematical—of Prussian Poland, would be erected into a state administered by Germany and Austria jointly. In addition it has been foreshadowed that Germany expects to annex the Courland and a portion of Lithuania.

Poland.

The real question is, of course, Poland. For Germany, a Poland under Teutonic guidance would be a buffer state against Russia. The Slavs would be divided, Pan-Slavism abolished. Poland would be a splendid field for German economic exploitation; would supply army corps for the Austro-German armies; would be a colony, not in Africa, but in Europe.

To such a condition Russia would hardly consent now, if the situation in the Slav empire is correctly reported. It is conceivable that Russia, having promised Poland autonomy, would consent to a really independent Poland, reconstructed by mutual sacrifices of Austria, Prussia and Russia, by an undoing of the work of Frederick the Great. In return she might be paid by the eastern half of Galicia, people by Russians, if Austria would consent to such a sacrifice and take her pay in Serbia.

Yet there is small reason to believe either Austria or Germany would now consent to retire from Poland and give complete freedom to this state. As for the Courland, Russia will not give that up until she has been thoroughly beaten. Germany, now occupying most of it, will hardly retire, unless, in fact, her desire for peace passes all present belief. But if peace in the East is possible on any terms, it is hard to see how these can be other than the complete emancipation of Poland and the guarantee by all three of its neighbors that it shall be independent.

The Balkans.

There remains now the question which is most important. It is conceivable that Germany will consent to retire from France and Belgium, abandon the hope of an indemnity, and even agree to the erection of an independent Poland and the

cession by Austria of the Trentine region to Italy. These things, although unlikely, are conceivable, but they are only conceivable if in return Germany obtains for herself and for Austria a free hand from the Danube to the Aegean and from the Adriatic to the Golden Horn.

Unquestionably Germany and Austria will insist in any offers for peace they now make that Serbia shall be put under Austrian control, that Germany shall be permitted a free hand in the Turkish Empire—in other words, that the two Central Empires shall be permitted to extend their political and commercial control to the Golden Horn and thence through Asia Minor to the valley of the Euphrates and the Straits of Suez. This is the German "place in the sun," long sought, now practically conquered, and the real prize that Germany hopes to win in the war.

French Future in Africa.

Now, such a success means little to France, whose future lies in North Africa, not in Western Asia and in the western, not the eastern, Mediterranean. But for Russia it would bring the end of the long cherished ambition to possess Constantinople; it would mean the renunciation of all influence in the Balkans; it would entail the sacrifice of Serbia and of Bulgaria, momentarily outside the Slav fold, but still regarded as a Russian ward.

For the Czar, it would mean that Teutonic influence would henceforth be seated at the outlets of the Russian Empire, holding the gates of the Black and the Baltic seas, pressing the land frontier of the Caucasus and reaching eastward into Persia. It would necessitate a surrender of all that Slavdom has hoped and worked and fought for during the centuries from Peter to the present Nicholas.

Such a concession, such a surrender, such an abdication Slavdom might make if it were exhausted, beaten to the knees, if the Hohenzollern were in Moscow and Petrograd instead of Warsaw and Vilna. But no such concession seems now possible, and it is the absolute minimum of

The Questions of Belgium,
Alsace Lorraine, Poland
and the Balkans.(Copyright, 1915,
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any German terms of peace which would not compel the Kaiser to go back to his people empty handed after the terrible conflict, and confess that for their sacrifices there was nothing to show but sterile military triumphs and the conquest of provinces that had been retroceded to obtain peace.

What of Britain?

Yet, if it were conceivable that Russia would give up her dreams and turn her back upon the vision of the spires of Stamboul, what of Britain? For her German supremacy at Constantinople would mean an immediate menace to Egypt and an ultimate peril to India. It would mean that Germany would possess the capital of Islam and would be able to turn to her advantage the religious fanaticism of millions of British native subjects.

Great Britain has before made war and threatened war because she has believed that the safety of the empire would be imperilled if a hostile nation, one of the great powers, replaced the Turk at Constantinople. Germany has proclaimed her march to the East as an advance upon Egypt and India; she has announced that it is a sword thrust at the heart of the British Empire, and the facts bear out the threat. Therefore, Britain cannot rest so long as there are left to her men and ships and money, and these remain.

Peace between France and Germany, between Italy and Austria, is now possible. Germany has failed to destroy France, and there is no longer any hope of reaching Paris or the Channel. The evacuation of Belgium, even a readjustment of the boundary of Lorraine—the benefit being with the French—are not unthinkable. A free Poland and a mutual sacrifice in the East are conceivable. Russia may be so badly beaten that she will resign her claim to defend Serbia and dominate Bulgaria. But there is not the smallest reason to believe that Great Britain is ready to surrender the key of her empire to her German opponent, and no present peace is conceivable that does not concede to the Austro-German alliance supremacy in the Balkans and domination at the Golden Horn.

Peace Impossible.

The real reason why peace will not come now, can not come now, will be found, I believe, in the fact that Great Britain has everything to lose by any peace that could be made on the basis of existing conditions and no proportionate loss to fear from a continued strife. Her armies have begun to arrive. Her losses are insignificant compared with Germany's. Her fleet is supreme. Her allies, particularly France, are still ready to go forward.

It is the Napoleonic episode over again and Britain is playing the part that ruined Napoleon. She is better placed for allies than before, for France is far and away a greater ally than any she had in the earlier conflict. Peace cannot be made until London wills it, and London is as far from willing peace now as it was from wishing war in the last days of July, 1914.

Peace is impossible because Germany will not surrender her ambition to obtain a place in the sun. She is probably prepared to evacuate Belgium and France; she has at certain times during the war indicated a willingness to make slight concessions to France in German Lorraine. Even the Russian situation might be settled, for Germany might be willing to retire to her old frontiers if Russia consented to retire from the Balkans; but she has nothing to give England, nothing to restore to England; no holding of any kind upon British territory, and Great Britain believes that the safety of the empire will not be assured until Austro-German rule ends, not at Suez, not at the Dardanelles, but at the Danube.

Germany Will Make Offers.

Germany will, I believe, make peace offers soon; make terms that will be liberal, in view of the present, if not the prospective, military situation; but they will be rejected by an alliance which will derive its chief driving power from British firmness, joined, it should be added, to a French willingness to make any sacrifice to end the German nightmare, which has endured since 1871. But if the British were willing to consider peace, neither France nor Russia would have any choice.

Bernhardt said that for Germany "the next war" would mean "world power or downfall." The "world power" is not yet attainable, after great triumphs and colossal losses. The "downfall" that is, the end of the German dream of a place in the sun, supremacy in Europe, is not yet realized. Peace is possible only if the dream is realized or resigned. The only other peace is a peace of exhaustion, and this is still outside all present calculation. Another year may bring a different mood.